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Do all dogs go to heaven? Tracking inter-species social relationships through archaeological surveys of pet cemeteries.

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Abstract:	An archaeological survey of pet cemeteries demonstrates the importance of non-human cemeteries in the investigation of changing human-animal relationships. Gravestone designs and inscriptions provide evidence for the perceived role of animals in people's lives and afterlives. Results suggest the slow development of an often-conflicted relationship in British society, from treasured pets to valued family members, and the increased belief of an animal afterlife. The discussion contextualises society's current attitude towards animals, identifying a continued struggle for humans to define relationships with pets when mourning their loss. The paper highlights the variety of research questions addressable with pet cemetery data.

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Introduction

Archaeologists have long recognized the value of historic cemeteries in addressing a wide range of research questions. Archaeological studies of cemeteries can address topics such as death, bereavement and commemoration (e.g., Bell 1994; Dethlefsen and Deetz 1966; Tarlow 1999); the development of complex social relationships and identities (e.g., Meyer 1993; Mytum 1990, 1993); reconstructions of wealth, power and status (e.g., Cannon 1989); and studies of past health, wellbeing and demographics (e.g., Mytum 1989). Historic and modern pet cemeteries provide similar opportunities to understand better the development of past human-animal relationships, yet few archaeologists engage with these burial grounds. This paper presents an archaeological survey of four pet cemeteries in England, investigating whether cemetery data provides evidence for the changing roles of animals in people's lives and afterlives. Results are interpreted alongside archaeological, historical and sociological literature and demonstrate the value of pet cemeteries in further understanding our continuously changing relationships with animal companions in the historic/post-medieval period around the world.

Archaeology of pets

Compelling evidence for the positive identification of a pet/companion animal is difficult to find in the archaeological record (Sykes 2014; Thomas 2005). Skeletal remains and their archaeological contexts offer clues on past human-animal relationships; however, these are difficult to interpret and often inconclusive. Not all pets were given discrete burials and not all discrete burials recovered by archaeologists are necessarily indicative of an animal companion (Morris 2011; Pluskowski 2012; Thomas 2005: 95). Additional skeletal evidence can further inform on past human-animal relationships. Butchery patterns and age at death distributions inform on whether populations of animals were mainly exploited for meat, secondary products or other reasons, while pathologies and trauma identified on bones can provide insight into maltreatment or care (Thomas 2005:95; Tourigny et al. 2016).

Unfortunately, diseases and trauma can have multiple aetiologies, rendering differential diagnoses difficult to link with the direct human treatment of animals (Thomas 2016).

Concepts like 'care' and 'wellbeing' are relative and historically specific, further complicating the matter (Thomas 2016: 169). Human-animal co-burials offer further opportunity to infer the presence of a pet/companion but these are rare and their meanings

can be interpreted in multiple ways (Morris 2011). So few are the occasions to identify pets in the archaeological record.

A history of pet burials and commemoration

Relationships between people and animals can simultaneously vary from purely functional to primarily emotional attachments. Human-animal relationships change over time and space to take on a variety of roles. While species such as cats and dogs can serve functional roles (e.g., for pest control or security), it is generally agreed that modern pet keeping, defined as animals kept in the home for the purpose of entertainment and companionship, began for Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Ritvo 1987; Tague 2008: 290). Pet ownership then became increasingly common across a range of social groups throughout the nineteenth century (Serpell 1986: 51).

For as long as people lived with animals, they needed to manage dead animal bodies. Dog burials are commonly recovered from prehistoric and Roman sites in Britain but fewer are identified in the medieval period (Morris 2016: 13) when dog and cat skeletons are more likely to be recovered from rubbish deposits (Thomas 2005). Not all animal bodies were buried in the later post-medieval period, as some dogs and horses were sold to knacker yards (Wilson and Edwards 1993: 54). Post-medieval disposal practices do not necessarily reflect a lack of care for the animals in life, but rather the influence of Christian doctrine on appropriate burial practice and hygienic concerns related to body disposal (Mytum 1989; Thomas 2005).

The eighteenth century saw the publication of epitaphs and elegies for pets in very small print runs. These were mostly satirical and generally intended for amusement; however, some were suggestive of public discourse at the time and touched on controversial topics like whether or not animals had souls and the morality of pet keeping (Tague 2008). While a few elite households occasionally held small funerals and erected memorials to deceased pets within their private gardens (Thomas 1983: 118), the first public pet cemetery in Britain appeared in the late nineteenth century in the affluent London borough of Westminster. After a dog named Cherry died in 1881, its owner asked a gatekeeper at Hyde Park if Cherry could be buried there. A space was allotted in the gatekeeper's personal garden where hundreds of other dogs were interred over the next few decades (Hodgetts 1893: 630) (Figure 1). Publicly accessible pet cemeteries continued to appear across Britain throughout the twentieth century.

Historians and geographers recognized the value of British pet cemeteries in studying past human-animal relationships, providing much-needed discussions on the meanings behind the spaces occupied by these graves, the human emotions involved in animal commemoration and how pet cemeteries reflect past and current social values (Howell 2002; Kean 2013; Lorimer 2019; Mangum 2007). These studies provide important historical context and theoretical foundations for an archaeological survey. Other scholars have looked at pet cemeteries elsewhere in the world, adopting anthropological and sociological approaches to their studies without necessarily drawing from the vast archaeological literature on cemetery recording methods and data analysis (e.g., Ambros 2010; Bardina 2017; Brandes 2009; Chalfen 2003; Gaillemain 2009; Pregowski 2016a; Schuurman and Redmalm 2019; Veldkamp 2009). This paper takes a more systematic approach to the recording of burial grounds, comparing results to contemporary human burial practices and examining changing commemoration practices. The resulting discussion demonstrates how other disciplines can make use of archaeological approaches and data.

Methods

Sarah Tarlow describes gravestones as “history and archaeology; both text and artefact. They are both deliberately communicative and unintentionally revealing” (Tarlow 1999: 2). As with human burial grounds, pet cemeteries are locations where social relationships are negotiated and reproduced in the stones, whether intentionally or not. Evidenced by the works of Howell (2002) and Kean (2013), historic British pet cemeteries contain clues revealing of human attitudes towards animals, but we need a systematic way of studying the materiality of pet cemeteries to properly examine how representative they are of wider social trends. Following the standards described by Mytum (2000) for recording human cemeteries, I recorded all remaining, visible stones present in four British pet cemeteries. Inscriptions and designs were photographed and recorded for each grave marker. Many gravestones were damaged, buried, toppled or their inscriptions were eroded away. Inscriptions were only transcribed when legible. The date of death is assumed to be the same as, or near to, the date of erection. Damaged stones are omitted from analyses when appropriate. Over the years, some gravestones were relocated to different sections of their respective cemeteries to accommodate the development of new footpaths and/or for aesthetic reasons. This is common practice in cemeteries (Tarlow 1999: 14) and does not affect the conclusions put forward in

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3 this paper. The following analyses and discussions break down the data according to research
4 themes, highlighting changing human-animal relationships and demonstrating potential
5 contributions to further research.
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9 Some of the largest cemeteries in the country were surveyed, representing burials from the
10 late nineteenth to the early twentieth century (Table 1; Figure 2). These include England's
11 first public pet cemetery at Hyde Park, a large suburban cemetery in Ilford and two
12 cemeteries in the north-east. The results demonstrate the usefulness of such an approach to
13 the study of human-animal relationships; they do not attempt to represent a complete analysis
14 of the complex ways people interacted with animals across time and space. Most gravestones
15 were erected between 1890 and 1910, and between 1945 and 1980 (Table 2). The
16 concentration of data between these two periods makes it difficult to observe trends from the
17 early to mid-twentieth century. Few nineteenth-century gravestones note the animal species
18 but Hodgetts (1893) identifies the Hyde Park grounds as a cemetery for dogs. The majority of
19 recorded gravestones in this study are for dogs, although an increasing proportion of cats are
20 buried as we progress through the twentieth century.
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33 **Pets, friends or family?**

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35 The vocabulary used to describe animals reveals the relationship commemorators held with
36 them. Most stones from all periods are quite simple, featuring only the names given to
37 animals, relevant dates and perhaps an opening statement like 'In memory of'. A few include
38 further details about the relationship. Many of the earlier graves refer to animals as pets,
39 friends or companions and such references continue through to the end of the twentieth
40 century, but there are differences in the ways commemorators refer to themselves. As was
41 common practice in the nineteenth century, gravestones often include the names or initials of
42 those erecting the monuments (Tarlow 1999: 66). Late nineteenth and early twentieth century
43 pet gravestones are no different and often include names or initials of owners. Occasionally,
44 the commemorators' names are more prominently figured than the animal's. A handful of
45 graves reference the animal leaving behind their 'sorrowing mistress'. Naming the
46 commemorator continues throughout the twentieth century; however, by mid-century, proper
47 nouns and initials are often replaced with pronouns like "Mummy", "Dad", "Nan" or
48 "Auntie", suggesting a familial relationship (Figure 3).
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Some gravestones explicitly describe the relationship within its text, either with introductory statements like “In memory of my dear pet” or through epitaphs like “A faithful friend and constant companion”. The relationship described in the text sometimes conflicts with the commemorator’s self-reference. For example, Cooch’s epitaph (d.1952) reads “Our faithful pet and companion” but the commemorator identifies themselves as ‘Mummy’. References to animals as family members increase after WWII (Figure 4), coinciding with a rise in the use of family surnames on pet gravestones (Figure 5). Some early adopters of surnames put them in brackets or quotation marks, as if to acknowledge they are not full members of the family or perhaps to pre-emptively address any criticism.

The Victorian era represents a watershed for human-pet relationships, marked by more discourse on animal welfare and the changing role of dogs in British society as they became increasingly central figures in the family household (Howell 2002: 8; 2015). Some scholars interpret the establishment of pet cemeteries apart from human ones as representative of pets occupying ‘liminal’ positions within society; a special relationship within the family that is not quite equal to that of the humans involved (e.g., Gaillemin 2009; Ambros 2010). While the separateness of pet and human cemeteries in Britain is easily explained by the influence of religious doctrine governing human burial grounds, the century-long record in the pet gravestones highlights how people continued to struggle to identify and label their relationship with non-human animals. Even in the late twentieth century, there is a discrepancy between the role of the animals in life, as suggested by their treatment after death, and the language used to describe the relationship. An animal may be considered part of the family, but this belief is not always committed to public text on the gravestone (Bardina 2017; Pregowski 2016; Schuurman and Redman 2019).

Immortality, spirituality and reunion

Howell (2002; 2015) describes how Victorian concepts of heaven changed to become a recreation of the family home in the afterlife, a home in which the dog played a prominent role. While the act of burial and the text on some of the earliest gravestones provide evidence of the increasing belief in animal life after death (Howell 2002; Brandes 2009; Gaillemin 2009), epitaphs and gravestone designs reveal an initial hesitance at the direct expression of such beliefs. The language used among those earliest stones is carefully worded to only suggest or hope for reunification in an afterlife. For example, the commemorator of Grit (d.1900) demonstrates uncertainty when they wrote, “Could I think we’d meet again, it would

lighten half my pain". As we progress into the mid-twentieth century, references to the afterlife increase slightly but those that do mention it, tend to be more assertive. For example, commemorators of "the brave little cat", Denny, confidently wrote in 1952 "God bless until we meet again".

Howell (2002: 13) discusses how some Hyde Park gravestones draw attention to the few Bible verses that might tenuously be interpreted to suggest animals have souls. Seven stones reference Bible scripture: four quote Luke XII. 6. ("Not one of them is forgotten before God"), another Psalms L. 10 ("Every beast in the forest is mine saith the Lord") and another Romans VIII. 21 ("the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God"). The last one references John XIII. 7 to suggest animal death is a part of God's plan ("Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand"). References to Christianity increase following WWII, where noticeably more crosses and epitaphs invoking God's care and protection are present on gravestones (Figure 6).

Late twentieth-century cemeteries in the north-east contain no references to Christianity or reunification in heaven, countering the trend observed in the London area. This is a result of the council-run cemetery not allowing crosses (Coates 2012:75), further highlighting the contentious nature of this belief and the influence of religion. While the lack of Christian symbols on early stones may be surprising, it is worth noting such symbols appeared relatively infrequently in Victorian human cemeteries. Tarlow (1999: 73-75, 143) observes that Christian symbols and references to a heavenly reunion are more reflective of twentieth-century cemetery trends.

Attitudes towards animal death

The early nineteenth century witnessed radical transformations in human burial practices, as overcrowded urban graveyards led to the formation of for-profit cemeteries outside city centres (Curl 1972: 181-182; Mytum 1989: 284). A changing relationship between the living and the dead is also evident in an increased desire by the bereaved to visit the grave and wanting burials to remain perpetually undisturbed (Tarlow 1999: 145). People began spending a lot of money on funerals and permanent commemoration, demonstrating a desire to mourn publicly, resulting in a higher number of gravestones relative to previous centuries (Tarlow 1999). While the majority opt to bury their animals in private gardens, the creation of pet cemeteries and the emotional epitaphs on a few early animal gravestones suggest a

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desire for public expressions of grief following a deep loss (Howell 2002; Kean 2013). The need to express grief following the loss of a beloved animal was at odds with socially acceptable beliefs of the time. Not believing in animal souls conflicted with the need to mourn a beloved individual's death (Tague 2008: 298). Howell (2002:7) argues the establishment of the first public pet cemeteries signal people's desire for an animal afterlife. While only a few early graves specifically mention desires for reunification, the symbolism apparent in many of the gravestones suggest people conceptualised animal death in the same way as human death, through the metaphor of sleep.

Understanding death through the metaphor of sleep featured prominently in the late Victorian era (Tarlow 1999). Sleep is a particularly attractive and comforting metaphor as it suggests an impermanent state without being explicit about beliefs on animal immortality. Many of the graves at Hyde Park followed trends observed in contemporary human burial plots to include both kerbs and a headstone, as if mimicking a bed. Some even have raised body stones for increased visual effect (Figure 7). Gravestone texts regularly use sleep-related language common to human gravestones, such as 'Rest in Peace' and 'Here lies [...]'. Sam's epitaph (d.1894) reads 'After life's fitful slumber, he sleeps well' while Snap and Peter's headstone (d.1890s) reads 'We are only sleeping, Master'. Society's attitudes towards death changes little as the sleep metaphor is continuously used throughout the twentieth century to conceptualise death, following patterns seen in human cemeteries (Tarlow 1999: 109).

Human gravestones of the nineteenth century tended to be large, of various standardized shapes and often included secular designs such as foliate borders and architectural elements like pilasters and pediments. Many were set in beautifully landscaped garden-like cemeteries and included symbols of the neo-classic revival (e.g., columns, obelisks, urns) (Tarlow 1999: 69-73). This is remarkably not the case in Hyde Park, where gravestones are nearly all the same small size (averaging: 31cm height; 24cm width; 5cm thickness), mostly cut of the same stone and tucked away in a small, private corner of the park. They are almost all formed of the same basic shape and only six of 471 gravestones had additional decorative elements. The uniformity of gravestones, the lack of decorative elements and the remoteness of their location suggests pet burials do not simply reflect another form of conspicuous consumption, but represent an actual desire to bury and commemorate animals.

Following patterns observed in human cemeteries, a greater variety of gravestone designs appear in twentieth century pet cemeteries, as commemorators could select from an increased

supply of standardized shapes that include foliate borders and bespoke elements such as engravings of animals and small sculptures (best evidenced by the gravestones at the PDSA Ilford pet cemetery) (Figure 8). Where human gravestones diminish in size following WWI (Tarlow 1999: 152), pet monuments occasionally become larger and more elaborate in the mid-twentieth century.

As British society became increasingly secular throughout the twentieth century and more tolerant of different religious beliefs (Brown 2009), there is less reluctance to express publicly a belief in animal souls, reunification in the afterlife and membership of animals within the family. These changes are especially pronounced in the second half of the twentieth century and also observed elsewhere in the world. In their assessment of pet cemeteries in Finland and Sweden, Schuurman and Redmalm (2019) suggest fewer references to owners in post-WWII pet gravestones provides evidence for acceptance of animals in the family. Brandes (2009: 107-109) identified increased use of familial identifiers in later 20th-century pet burials in Hartsdale, NY.

While it may appear counter-intuitive to see an increase in religious symbolism in a more secular society, this trend is also noted in contemporary human cemeteries in Britain and in other western countries (Anderson et al, 2011; Tarlow 1999). As Anthony (2016:361) notes, while human cemeteries can become more inclusive in the twentieth century, they are not necessarily secular. Pet cemeteries like the PDSA in Ilford show a clear increase in Christian symbolism, and others like the Buena Vista cemetery in Leicestershire (est. 1977) mainly contain standardised wooden crosses as grave markers (Figure 9). The standard use of crosses at Buena Vista and the restrictions on religious symbolism imposed on other cemeteries (e.g., North Shields, Jesmond) suggests that theological orthodoxy is enforced differently in cemeteries.

Christian symbols are equally sparse in the few early cemeteries described outside of Britain. The generally accepted Christian position is that animals do not have souls or spirits and that animal life is not as valued as a human's; however, there is a belief that animals are God's treasured creations (Lewis 2008: 314-315). Despite mirroring human burial customs and hoping for reunification in a Christian heaven, the struggle to define the role of animals in the afterlife continued throughout the twentieth century both in Britain and abroad. Brandes (2009) notes that most Christian symbols on pet gravestones appear after the 1980s in the United States' first pet cemetery (Hartsdale, NY), thus suggesting a more conservative

approach compared to London's post-war pet owners. In Moscow, where the majority do not believe animals possess spirituality, pet epitaphs suggest a continued life beyond death and reunion with the family without evoking religious references (Bardina 2017). Paris's pet cemetery banned crosses upon its establishment in 1899; however, Gaillemain (2009) notes Parisians found other ways to suggest pets had souls by substituting crosses with hearts, doves and angels/saints. Conversely, many of Japan's Buddhist cemeteries commonly include both human and pet burials, welcoming the idea of pets having souls (Veldkamp 2009). Prohibited religious symbols are more indicative of religious doctrine and political motives than they are necessarily a reflection of people's beliefs.

The need to grieve

Similarities in style of early pet cemeteries to Victorian human cemeteries possibly reflects the adoption of ritual practices originally intended for people where no rituals existed for animals (Dresser 2000:12). While some scholars describe the act of burial and commemoration itself as evidence for a belief in animal souls (e.g., Bardina 2017), the pet cemetery movement also developed out of a need to mourn lost companions in a public way alongside other bereaved people. The bond formed with an animal can be just as close to that formed between humans (Cowles 2016) and the archaeological data indicates people are becoming increasingly comfortable in expressing this bond, in grieving its loss and commemorating it. While the pet cemetery movement may partly be explained as early expressions of belief in animal souls, their purpose may have shifted over time, as has happened in Japanese cemeteries where funerals shifted from prayers for animals souls to providing opportunities for pet owners to make their way through the grieving process (Veldkamp 2009: 333).

Today, people continue to struggle finding an appropriate outlet to express the deep emotional pain they suffer following the loss of a beloved animal, fearing social repercussions for either anthropomorphising their relationships with animals, being too sentimental, or too disrespectful to people and religious beliefs (Desmond 2011; Schuurman and Redmalm, 2019: 32; Woods 2000; Morley and Fook 2005). In the UK, charitable organisations like the Blue Cross and the Rainbow Bridge Pet Loss Grief Centre offer counselling services to bereaved humans following the loss of their pet. The RSPCA website deliberately reassures bereaved pet owners that feelings of deep sadness, loneliness and isolation are normal and of no reason to be ashamed (RSPCA n.d.). Online forums and digital

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pet cemeteries provide new venues where people can express their grief and commemorate their beloved pets. These online commemorations can similarly provide scholars with evidence for changing human-animal relationships (MacKay et al. 2016). Pet cemetery research puts this grief into historical context, demonstrating to the currently bereaved that they are not alone in their struggles to express their feelings.

Conclusion

The relationships people develop with animals are partly a product of the cultural milieu in which they form. People’s reaction to animal death has varied across time and space, but treatment of the animal body (Tourigny et al. 2016) and the material culture associated with animal death and commemoration inform us on human perceptions of these relationships. The archaeological data presented in this paper demonstrates the wide range of human-animal relationships depicted in pet cemeteries and their value towards investigating changing patterns through time. The results shed light on non-human animals’ transition from being pets and companions to becoming family members, and on changing beliefs about the animal’s role in the afterlife. They provide testimony to the conflicts between individual beliefs and societal pressures. Pet cemetery studies can further contribute to research themes not discussed in this paper, such as differential relationships between social groups (e.g., based on ethnicity, economic status or gender); relationships to changing household demographics; studies of the life expectancy of pets; and, changing naming practices as a reflection of cultural attitudes (e.g., Brandes 2009; Inoue et al. 2018, Chalfen 2003; Pregowski 2016b; Thomas 1983: 119).

Comparing pet burial practices from cemeteries around the world demonstrates controversy in attitudes towards animals, and variance between social and cultural groups. Whether gravestones are explicit in their portrayal of human-animal relationships or not, pet cemeteries demonstrate some level of emotional response to the loss of a pet. As Schuurman and Redmalm (2019) observed in modern Scandinavian pet cemeteries, emotions are often ambiguous, reflecting an uncertainty in defining one’s relationship with animals and identifying what constitutes acceptable forms of grief following the loss of this relationship. The archaeological data presented here historically contextualises this conflict in British society, demonstrating how public attitudes change over time and how they manifest themselves in the material record. Pet cemeteries further allow us to contextualize our current

relationship with animals through comparisons to contemporary human burial practices, thus demonstrating how archaeology can contribute to other fields of research. As our relationship with pets continues to change, so do burial practices. Cremation services are increasingly popular and new forms of material culture related to animal death and commemoration are emerging, providing us with new opportunities to investigate the material manifestation of our relationship with non-human animals.

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For Peer Review

Figure Captions

Figure 1: Surviving gravestones from Hyde Park Pet Cemetery (Photo: author).

Figure 2: Location of recorded pet cemeteries. 1. Hyde Park; 2. PDSA cemetery; 3. Jesmond Dene; 4. Northumberland Park. (Map: Neils Dabaut.)

Figure 3: Vocabulary used in reference to commemorator.

Figure 4: Type of human-animal relationship mentioned on gravestones.

Figure 5: Use of surnames on animal gravestones.

Figure 6: Number of references to Christianity and concepts of reunification observed on gravestones.

Figure 7: Example of the use of body stones, kerbs and headstones used to resemble the look of a bed.

Figure 8: Examples of variation in gravestone design from PDSA pet cemetery in Ilford. Left: Whiskey (d.1987), Right: Billy (d. 1951) (Photos: author).

Figure 9: Wooden cross grave markers characteristic of the Buena Vista Pet Cemetery, Leicestershire, UK (Photo: Katie Bridger).

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Table 1: Cemetery information

Cemetery	Dates	No. recorded gravestones
Hyde Park, London	1881 – 1976	471
PDSA, Ilford	1930 – 1993	467
Northumberland Park, North Shields	1949 – 1988	210
Jesmond Dene, Jesmond	1969 – 1991	21

For Peer Review

Table 2: Number of recorded stones by decade (determined by earliest date of death on gravestone).

	Hyde Park	PDSA	North Shields	Jesmond	Total
1880s	5	0	0	0	5
1890s	255	0	0	0	255
1900s	70	0	0	0	70
1910s	8	0	0	0	8
1920s	4	0	0	0	4
1930s	0	6	0	0	6
1940s	7	21	3	0	31
1950s	3	189	111	0	303
1960s	0	105	69	3	177
1970s	1	8	2	10	21
1980s	0	7	3	1	11
1990s	0	2	0	1	3
No date	118	129	22	6	275



Figure 1: Surviving gravestones from Hyde Park Pet Cemetery (Photo: author).

1422x1066mm (72 x 72 DPI)



Figure 2: Location of recorded pet cemeteries. 1. Hyde Park; 2. PDSA cemetery; 3. Jesmond Dene; 4. Northumberland Park. (Map: Neils Dabaut)

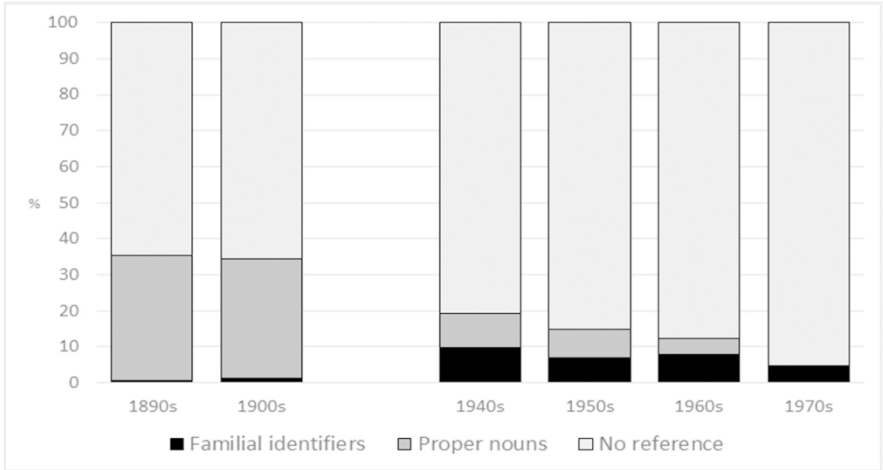


Figure 3: Vocabulary used in reference to commemorator.
134x95mm (300 x 300 DPI)

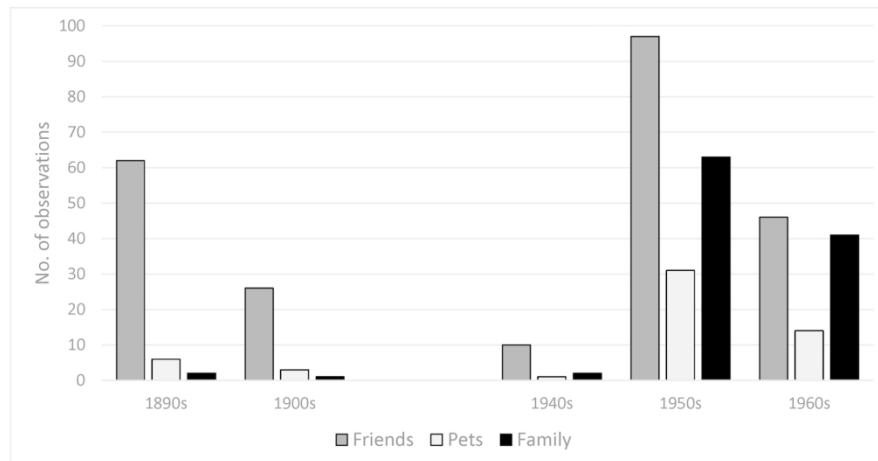


Figure 4: Type of human-animal relationship mentioned on gravestones.

134x95mm (300 x 300 DPI)

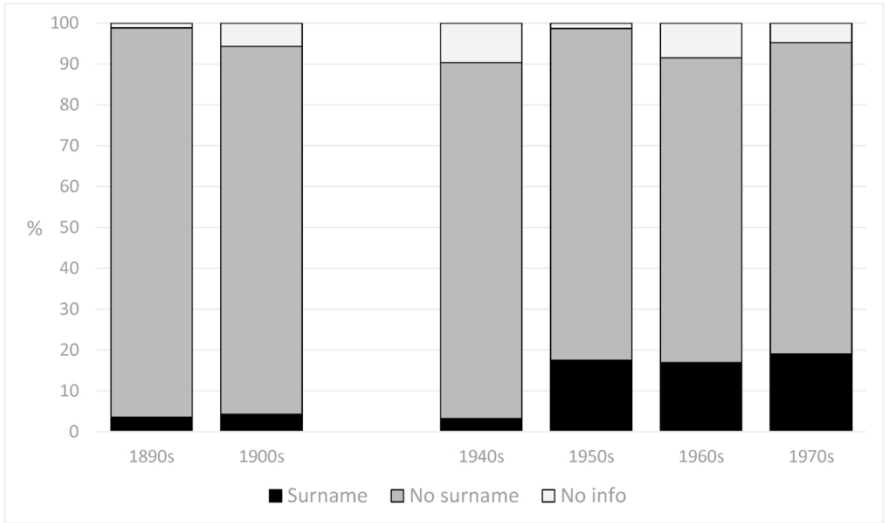


Figure 5: Use of surnames on animal gravestones.

134x95mm (300 x 300 DPI)

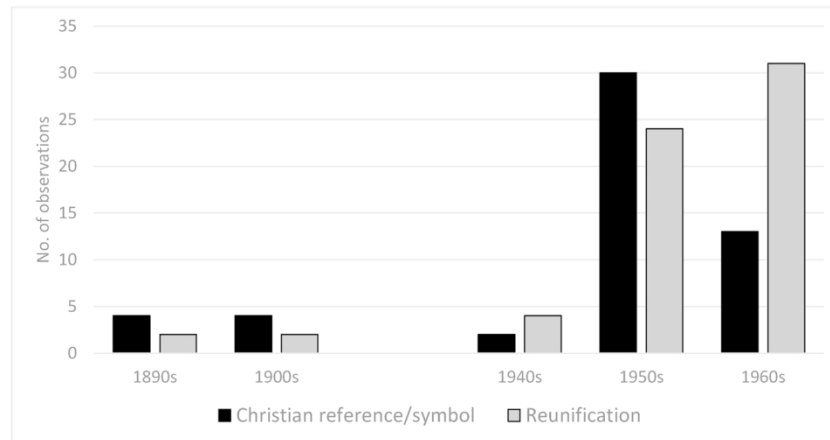


Figure 6: Number of references to Christianity and concepts of reunification observed on gravestones.

134x95mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Figure 7: Example of the use of body stones, kerbs and headstones used to resemble the look of a bed.

119x55mm (300 x 300 DPI)



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